

COMMON SENSE,
ADDRESSED TO THE
INHABITANTS

OF

AMERICA,

(Paine (Th)) On the following interesting
SUBJECTS.

- I. Of the Origin and Defects of Government in general, with concise Remarks on the English Constitution.
- II. Of Monarchy and Hereditary Succession.
- III. Thoughts on the present State of American Affairs.
- IV. Of the present Ability of America, with some miscellaneous Reflections.

A NEW EDITION, with several Additions in the Body of the Work. To which is added an APPENDIX; together with an Address to the People called QUAKERS.

N. B. The New Addition here given increases the Work upwards of One-Third.

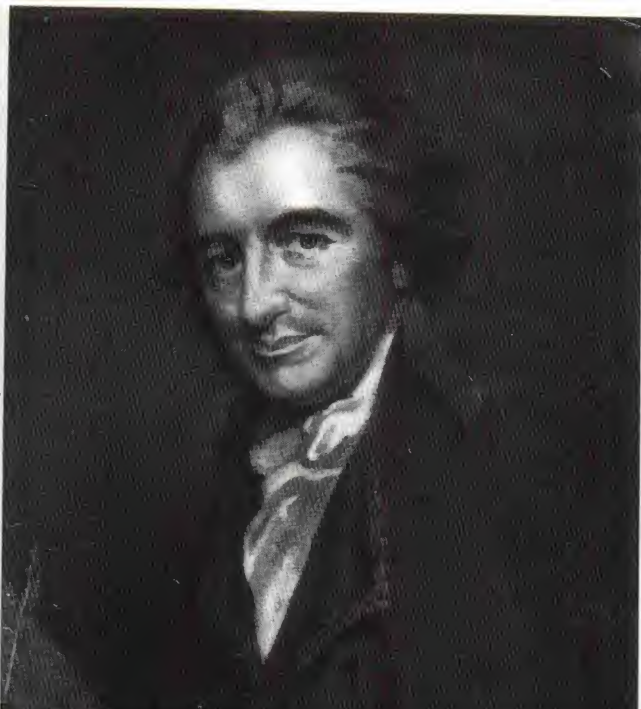
*Man knows no Master save creating Heaven,
Or those whom Choice and common Good ordain.*

THOMSON,

PHILADELPHIA, PRINTED;

LONDON, RE-PRINTED,

For J. ALMON, opposite Burlington-House in Piccadilly. 1776.



PAINE'S AMERICAN PAMPHLETS

Tom Paine not only popularised the idea of American Independence but helped to keep the spirit of Union alive through seven years of war

IN THE CLOSING MONTHS OF THE WAR of Independence Thomas Paine wrote proudly but not unfairly of the part he had played in the propaganda battle:

It was the cause of America that made me an author . . . and if, in the course of more than seven years, I have rendered her any service, I have likewise added something to the reputation of literature, by freely and disinterestedly employing it in the great cause of mankind, and showing there may be genius without prostitution.

He was thinking not only of *Common Sense*, published anonymously in January, 1776, but of the series of pamphlets he wrote between December, 1776, and December, 1783, under the general title of *The American Crisis*.

Stuart Andrews

The impact of *Common Sense* is well known. Paine himself later claimed that 'its success was beyond anything since the invention of printing'. Well over 100,000 copies - perhaps as many as 120,000 - were sold in the three months following publication. The *Connecticut Gazette* likened the pamphlet to a 'land-flood that sweeps all before it', and added: 'The doctrine of Independence hath been in times past greatly disgusting . . . it is now become our delightful theme and commands our purest affections'.

This was the importance of *Common*

Sense: it presented independence as the only rational option, and it attacked George III - 'the Royal Brute of Britain' - and not just his ministers. Its robust phrases are too familiar to warrant repetition, though it is perhaps worth noticing that Paine, later to be regarded as the arch-foe of Christianity, bases much of his argument against monarchy on the evidence of Scripture - with frequent quotations from the First Book of Samuel.

And in spite of his uncomplimentary reference to William the Conqueror - 'a French bastard with an armed banditti' - Paine was insistent that America's roots were European, not British: 'Europe and not England is the parent country of America . . . we claim brotherhood with

every European Christian'. While in words that have some affinity with the lines later to be inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, Paine cast America in the role of 'an asylum for mankind'.

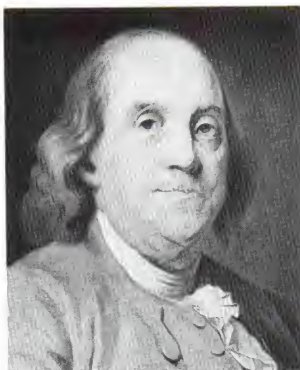
But beyond the rhetoric there were some practical proposals. There should be annual assemblies - 'their business wholly domestic and subject to the authority of a continental congress'. The prime business of this 'congress' would be 'to frame a Continental Charter of the United Colonies, answering to what is called the Magna Charta of England ... always remembering that our strength is continental, not provincial'. Congress must also take care to secure 'freedom and property to all men, and, above all things, the free exercise of religion, according to conscience'.

If this language seems to foreshadow the preamble to the Declaration of Independence drawn up later that year, the very notion of such a declaration was put forward in *Common Sense*:

Were a manifesto to be published, and despatched to foreign courts, setting forth the miseries we have endured, and the peaceable methods we have ineffectually used for redress; declaring at the same time that, not being able any longer to live happily or safely under the cruel disposition of the British court, we have been driven to the necessity of breaking off the connection with her; at the same time assuring all such courts of our peaceable dispositions towards them, and of our desire of entering into trade with them; such a memorial would produce more good effects to this continent, than if a ship were freighted with petitions to Britain.

How had *Common Sense* come to be written? Paine had arrived in America at the end of November, 1774. By January, 1775, he was writing for the newly established *Pennsylvania Magazine* at Philadelphia, and soon became its editor at a salary of £50 p.a. His first polemical piece to be written on American soil - within a few weeks of his arrival - appeared in another newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Journal*, on March 8th, 1775. It appeared under the pseudonym 'Humanus' and was entitled 'African Slavery in America'. Paine had no doubt where he stood on the question: 'Certainly one may, with as much reason and decency, plead for murder, robbery, lewdness and barbarity as for this practice'. He asked Americans to consider how they can 'complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them while they hold so many hundred thousands in slavery'. Just over a month later the first anti-slavery society in America was founded in Philadelphia, with Paine as one of its members.

A second piece over the same signature, this time entitled 'A Serious Thought', appeared in the *Pennsylvania Journal* of



Benjamin Franklin; portrait after Duplessis. It was Franklin who suggested to Paine that he should write a history of events in America.

October 18th, 1775. Paine's target now was not principally slavery in America, but British rule in India - and Britain's share in the slave-trade. Reflecting on Britain's treatment of the subject races, Paine asserts: 'I hesitate not for a moment to believe that the Almighty will finally separate America from Britain. Call it independence or what you will, if it is the cause of God and humanity it will go on'.

It was in October, 1775, that Benjamin Franklin, who had met Paine in England and had recommended him to friends in Philadelphia, suggested that he should write a history of events leading to the outbreak of war, with a view to publication in the following spring. Paine records what happened:

I had then formed the outlines of *Common Sense* and finished nearly the first part; and as I supposed the Doctor's design in getting out a history was to open the new year with a new system, I expected to surprise him with a production on that subject, much earlier than he thought of; and without informing him of what I was doing, got it ready for the press as fast as I conveniently could, and sent him the first pamphlet that was printed off.

Franklin's reaction is not recorded, though he was later to assure Paine that 'instead of repenting that I was your introducer into America, I value myself on the share that I had in procuring for it the acquisition of so useful and valuable a citizen'.

In his own assessment of the sequence of events from January, 1776, to the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781, Paine was to claim:

There is no instance in the world where a people so extended, and wedded to former habits of thinking, and under such a variety of circumstances, were so instantly and effectually pervaded by a turn in politics, as in the case of independence, and who

supported their opinion undiminished through such a succession of good and ill fortune, till they crowned it with success.

And it was in that 'succession of good and ill fortune', no less than in the original assertion of the inevitability of independence, that Paine played so important a part.

The first issue of *The American Crisis* appeared on December 19th, 1776, in the *Pennsylvania Journal*. Paine had been serving with the revolutionary army since August, when he had resigned his editorship. In September he had volunteered as aide-de-camp to General Nathaniel Greene and had served at Fort Lee on the Hudson. He took part in Washington's retreat across New Jersey, and the first number of the *American Crisis* was written on a drum-head by the light of a camp fire during that march. It opened with the resonant words:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer-soldier and sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands to it now, deserves the thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered: yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.

Paine's initial purpose was to minimise the set-back suffered at the hands of Howe, and to proclaim that the Almighty was on America's side. All that Howe had been doing for the past month was 'rather a ravage than a conquest, which the spirit of the Jerseys, a year ago, would have quickly repulsed, and which time and a little resolution will soon recover'.

That things had begun badly was hardly surprising: 'Wisdom is not the purchase of a day, and it is no wonder we should err at first setting off'. But to believe that the long-term prospects were favourable was not mere wishful thinking: 'I dwell not upon the vapours of imagination; I bring reason to your ears, and, in language as plain as A, B, C, hold up the truth to your eyes'. The pamphlet nevertheless ends with something of a rhetorical flourish:

By perseverance and fortitude we have the prospect of a glorious issue; by cowardice and submission, the sad choice of a variety of evils - a ravaged country - a depopulated city - habitations without safety - and slavery without hope - our homes turned into barracks and bawdy-houses for Hessians. . . . Look on this picture and weep over it! and if there yet remains one thoughtless wretch, who believes it not, let him suffer it unlamented.

The piece was signed 'COMMON SENSE'. Washington was sufficiently impressed with it to order it to be read at the head of every regiment. Its effect

on morale was perhaps reflected in the victory over the Hessians at Trenton on December 26th.

The second *Crisis* appeared on January 13th, 1777, and was chiefly directed at Lord Howe's proclamation requiring 'all such persons as are assembled together under the name of general or provincial congresses, committees, conventions, or other associations . . . to desist and cease from all such treasonable actings and doings'. In pointing out the absurdity of such a proclamation in the wake of British defeats at Trenton and Princeton, Paine prophesied how these events would appear to historians:

'The United States of America' will sound as pompously in the world, or in history, as 'The Kingdom of Great Britain'; the character of General Washington will fill a page with as much lustre as Lord Howe; and the congress have as much right to command the King and Parliament of London to desist from legislation, as they or you have to command the congress.

This seems to have been the first use in print of the term 'United States of America' - Paine coined the phrase as well as helping to give it substance.

He also correctly predicted the course the war would take. Howe had already missed his chance of conquering America: 'If you could not effect it in the summer, when our army was less than yours, nor in the winter, when we had none, how are you to do it? In point of generalship you have been outwitted; and in point of fortitude outdone'. The war would prove to be like a game of draughts: 'We can

move out of one square, to let you come in, in order that we may afterwards take two or three for one; and as we can always keep a double corner for ourselves, we can always prevent a total defeat'. Even apparent British successes would hasten Howe's downfall; 'The more surface you spread over, the thinner you will be, and the easier wiped away'.

Finally there came a more ominous warning: Howe should not neglect the risks at home. Paine claimed that, from what he knew of the disposition of the English people, 'it is easier for us to effect a revolution there, than you a conquest here'. A few thousand men landed in England 'with the declared design of deposing the present king, bringing his ministers to trial, and setting up the Duke of Gloucester in his stead' would achieve their object 'while you were grovelling here, ignorant of the matter'. And if this seems far-fetched, it is worth recalling John Wesley's anxious letters to Lord North and Lord Dartmouth in June, 1775.¹

Although Paine says that it is his practice to send copies of *Crisis* to England, he reminds his readers: 'I never troubled others with my notions till very lately, nor ever published a syllable in England in my life'. He adds that he has never sought to make money from his writings,

¹ See *History Today*, June, 1976.

'Sons of Freedom pulling down the statue of George III'. New York, 1776; engraving by John McRae. Paine saw American independence from Britain as both desirable and inevitable.

'reserving only the expense of printing and paper, and sometimes not even that'. His only aim is to be useful, and 'if your lordship love mankind as well as I do, you would, seeing you cannot conquer us, cast about and lend your hand towards accomplishing peace. Our independence, with God's blessing, we will maintain against all the world'.

The same theme runs through the third *Crisis* 'written this fourth year of the Union, which God preserve'. It was composed while waiting for the British to emerge from winter quarters, and Paine observes that 'while they continue their delay our strength increases'. The British army was 'like a wounded, disabled whale'. It wanted 'only time and room to die in; and though, in the agony of their exit, it may be unsafe to live with in the flapping of their tail, yet every hour shortens their date and lessens their power of mischief'. In the previous *Crisis*, he had, he explains, tried to show 'the impossibility of the enemy's making any conquest of America'. He now sees the need 'to go over some of the leading principles in support of independence'.

The idea of independence, he asserts, is supported by self-interest, by necessity and by morality. By seizing independence America would 'exchange Britain for Europe - shake hands with the world - live at peace with mankind - and trade to any market where we best can buy and sell'. But apart from being advantageous, separation was inevitable: 'Britain was too jealous of America to govern it justly - too ignorant to govern it well - and too





General Sir William Howe, 1729-1814. British Commander in America. Paine saw that by 1777 Howe had missed his chance of conquering America.

distant from it to govern it at all'. And as for the moral issue, 'war and desolation are become the trades of the Old World' whereas in America 'the present happy union of the states bids fair for extirpating the future use of arms from one quarter of the world'.

The tone then becomes more strident, first at the expense of the Tories: 'The whole race of prostitutes in New York were Tories; and the schemes for supporting the Tory cause in this city . . . were concerted and carried on in common bawdy-houses assisted by those who kept them'. Paine goes on to ridicule Lord Littleton's speech in the House of Lords in defence of 'the principle of unconditional submission' and Lord Talbot's easy assumption that the war can be ended 'in the course of a single campaign'. The British Army in America is characterised as being 'out of cash, out of heart and out of hope'.

Yet Howe is doubtless plotting a new attack, and his most probable target is Philadelphia. It is now clear that the British 'have given up the expectation of conquering America; their eye is now fixed upon the spoil'. They suppose Philadelphia to be well provisioned and expect to 'get more by robbing a town than by attacking an army'. The Americans, says Paine, 'are not now contending against an army of soldiers but against a band of thieves'.

This, the longest of all the issues of *Crisis*, concludes with a proposal to tax the Tories - and with the assertion that 'the only road to peace, honour and commerce is INDEPENDENCE'.

Crisis No. 4, dated September 12th, 1777, and written from Philadelphia,

records Washington's defeat at Brandywine Creek the previous day. Paine describes the battle as 'one of those alarms which are just sufficient to rouse us to duty, without being of consequence enough to depress our fortitude'. He reminds his readers: 'It is not a field of a few acres of ground, but a cause we are defending; and whether we defeat the enemy in one battle, or by degrees, the consequence will be the same'. So what the British army has gained at Brandywine is 'only a respite from ruin; an invitation to destruction'. The Americans are engaged in a struggle to 'make room on earth for honest men to live in', while Howe is left with 'the despairing reflection of being the tool of a miserable tyrant'.

Philadelphia nevertheless fell to the British a fortnight later; and a further fortnight after that, Paine was carrying messages from Congress (now at Lancaster, Pennsylvania) to Washington's army. During the winter of 1777-78 Paine divided his time between the army at Valley Forge and Congress, and it was not until March 1st that he was ready to address General Howe again in the pages of another *Crisis*. Paine now pretends to consider the most appropriate monument for Howe:

The simple genius of America hath discovered the art of preserving bodies, and embellishing them too, with much greater frugality than the ancients. In a balmage, sir, of humble tar, you will be as secure as Pharaoh, and in a hieroglyphic of feathers, you will rival in finery all the mummies of Egypt.

He accuses Howe of forgery - 'the forging and uttering of counterfeit continental bills' - and of military incom-

petence - 'I know of no one action of yours that can be styled masterly'. The King's recent speech at the opening of Parliament is 'like a soliloquy on ill luck', and the capture of Burgoyne's army (Paine correctly predicts) 'will sink his consequence as much in Europe as in America'.

The first five issues of *Crisis* had been addressed either to the American people or to the British commanders. No. 6, addressed to 'the inhabitants of America', and No. 7, to the British Commissioners at New York, follow the same pattern. But the next two issues (Philadelphia, November 21st, 1778 and March, 1780) are both addressed to 'the People of England'. Between these two dates Paine had resigned from his position as Secretary to the Congressional Committee of Foreign Affairs (which he had held since April, 1777) after divulging confidential information about negotiations with France. In November, 1779, he had become Clerk to the Pennsylvania Assembly, and wrote the preamble to the act abolishing slavery in that state which was passed on March 1st, 1780.

Although fifteen months separated the appearance of these two numbers of *Crisis*, their ostensible aim was not so much to raise the morale of the Americans as to persuade Englishmen to compel their government to make peace. For in the words of *Crisis* No. 8, 'everything which was predicted has happened; and all that was promised has failed'. Paine puts his principal emphasis here on commercial considerations. Why did Britain go to war at all? 'To make war with those who trade with us, is like setting a bulldog upon a customer at the shop door'. He therefore addresses himself to what he calls the 'mercantile and manufacturing part' of the kingdom. He tells them: 'It is in your interest to see America an independent country, and not a conquered one. If conquered she is ruined, and if ruined poor'. It ought not to matter to them 'who governs America, if your manufactures find a consumption there'. Their interests are being sacrificed to those of 'the caterpillar circle of the court', and they would do better to 'risk a revolution and call a congress, than be led on from madness to despair and from despair to ruin'.

In 1780, the year of the first League of Armed Neutrality against Britain, Paine is pleased to emphasise her diplomatic isolation: 'You seem surprised that Holland does not pour in her succours to maintain you mistress of the seas'. Indeed England was not only isolated but disinclined: 'The principle which produced the war divides the nation'. Her only prudent course is to make peace.

It is difficult to say what impression these editions of the *Crisis* made in Lon-

don, though we do know that in 1780 Paine seriously considered going to England himself. As he explains in a footnote to the second part of his *Rights of Man*:

I was strongly impressed with the idea that if I could get over to England without being known, and only remain in safety till I could get out a publication, that I should open the eyes of the country with respect to the madness and stupidity of its government.

But General Greene dissuaded him. In any case, on June 9th, 1780, Paine had to rush out another *Crisis* in response to the rumoured capture of Charlestown. It is not, he says, the conquest of towns, nor 'the accidental capture of garrisons' that can reduce so large a country as America. Charlestown was originally only a secondary objective, but, disappointed elsewhere, the British by 'prudently contenting themselves with what they can get, give a flourish of honour to conceal disgrace'.

He encourages his readers by reminding them that they are not now fighting their battle alone as in 1776. Britain

states, but did not empower it to tax the individual citizens. In October, 1780, Paine devoted what he called *The Crisis Extraordinary* to the subject of taxation.

He contrasted the annual cost of financing the war - which he put at an average of 13s 4d a head - with the burden of taxes likely to be imposed by a victorious Britain. Englishmen themselves were taxed so heavily that 'even the light from heaven is only permitted to shine into their dwellings by paying eighteenpence sterling per window annually'. In America, he claims, the apparent reluctance to pay taxes 'does not proceed from the weight or worth of the tax, but from the scarcity of the medium in which it is paid'. He proposes that the sum to be raised in the following year (something over £1 million) should come half from 'duties on imported goods and prize goods, and the other half by a tax on landed property'. He ends with the confident assertion that 'such are the resources of America, that she wants nothing but system to ensure success'.

Eighteen months later, in March,

Earlier in this issue of *Crisis*, Paine had made a spirited defence of the Union:

The Union of America is the foundation-stone of her independence; the rock on which it is built; and is something so sacred in her constitution that we ought to watch every word we speak, and every thought we think, that we injure it not even by mistake.

This was to be the theme of the last two editions of *Crisis* - No. 14 (undated) headed *The Last Crisis*, and *A Supernumerary Crisis* (dated December 9th, 1783). No. 14 begins: "The times that tried men's souls" are over - and the greatest and completest revolution the world ever knew, gloriously and happily accomplished'. But there was now a need to strengthen 'that happy union which has been our salvation, and without which we should have been a ruined people'. It is on 'the UNION OF THE STATES' that 'our great national character depends'. 'It is the flag of the United States which renders our ships and commerce safe on the seas, or in a foreign port.'

And in words that might serve as an epitome of the federal system so laboriously put together at Philadelphia between 1787 and 1789, Paine proclaimed:

The division of the empire into states is for our own convenience, but abroad this distinction ceases. The affairs of each state are local. They can go no farther than to itself. . . . Sovereignty must have power to protect all the parts that compose and constitute it; and as United States we are equal to the importance of the title, but otherwise we are not.

Alexander Hamilton never acknowledged a debt to Tom Paine: the collected *Federalist* papers contain no reference to any of Paine's pamphlets. Yet it is hard to deny that Paine played some part in creating that climate of opinion for which Hamilton and Madison are more usually given the credit. *Common Sense* may have articulated the idea of independence, but it was the *Crisis* tracts which for seven years kept the idea of Union alive and asserted its importance with a new vigour in the hour of victory.

NOTES ON FURTHER READING

The Complete Works of Thomas Paine, Political and Controversial, E. Truelove (London, 1850); Philip Sheldon Foner (ed.), *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, two volumes, Citadel Press (New York, 1945); A. O. Aldridge, *Man of Reason: the life of Thomas Paine*, Cresset (London, 1960); Samuel Edwards, *Rebels: a biography of Thomas Paine*, New English Library (London, 1974); Joseph Lewis, *Thomas Paine, author of the Declaration of Independence*, The Free Thought Press Association (New York, 1947); Joseph Lewis, *Thomas Paine and the American crisis, in Inspiration and wisdom from the writings of Thomas Paine*, The Free Thought Press Association (New York, 1954); W. E. Woodward, *Tom Paine: America's godfather 1739-1809*, Secker and Warburg (London, 1946).

MAGNA Britannia: her Colonies REDUC'D.



'Magna Britannia, her Colonies reduced.' A card sent by Franklin to 'men of influence' to propagandise against the Stamp Act - designed to produce colonial revenues and thus reduce the tax burden for England. A mutilated Britannia has slipped from her globe, her amputated limbs lie beside her, her ships are for sale and she is destitute, reduced to begging for alms.

'will suffer her West Indian islands to be over-run by France, and her southern settlements to be taken by Spain, rather than quit the object that gratifies revenge'. He nevertheless hints at a flagging of patriotic fervour when he refers to the opening of a voluntary subscription 'to raise a fund of hard money to be given as bounties to fill up the full quota of the Pennsylvania line'.

The problem of financing the war effort plagued Washington even at the moments of greatest danger. The Articles of Confederation allowed the Continental Congress to solicit levies from the various

1782, he returned to the question of finance in an issue of the *Crisis* subtitled 'On the Expenses, Arrangements and Disbursements for carrying on the War, and finishing it with Honour and Advantage'. The war was not Congress's war but the people's: 'The country first, by a mutual compact resolved to defend their rights, and maintain their independence at the hazard of their lives and fortunes'. No one knew whose turn it might next be to need armed assistance, 'for which reason that is the wisest state which sets the best example'. It was simply a sound insurance policy.